

# **Testimony to the City Council in Support of a Separate Department of Transportation**

**Presented by Dan Tangherlini, Acting Director of DDOT**

Good day, Chairperson Schwartz and members of the committee. I am Dan Tangherlini, Acting Director, District Division of Transportation. I am testifying today on behalf of the Williams Administration in support of Bill 14-343, to create a separate, cabinet-level Department of Transportation (DDOT) for the District of Columbia. DDOT would be responsible for the planning, development, construction, operations and maintenance of the District's transportation infrastructure and trees.

To know why it is desirable to recreate an independent Department of Transportation, it is useful to look back at some of the history of the transportation function in the District Government as well as recall some of the major challenges facing our transportation infrastructure program over the past 18 months.

## **Background**

As you will recall, prior to 1984, the DDOT was a separate department. At that time, in an effort to streamline government, several infrastructure and service delivery agencies, including the then Department of Transportation, were rolled together into a new Department of Public Works (DPW).

However, as the financial situation worsened in the early '90s, scarce resources were focused more and more on meeting the daily needs of the organization, particularly, delivering the most basic services. The transportation program, unfortunately, just did not receive anything close to the needed attention and resources. The low point for transportation was probably in 1995. In the depths of the District's fiscal crisis, we became the first State – and the District is a State for the purposes of Federal Highway Aid funds – unable to make its 20% match for its annual allotment of highway funds.

To begin the rescue of the District's transportation program, the Federal Government provided the first-ever loan for the District to make its match. In order to repay the loan and ensure that the District would never again be in

this position, the Council created the District of Columbia Highway Trust Fund (HTF), fueled by District's motor fuels taxes. The HTF not only allowed the Federal loan to be repaid ahead of schedule, it assured that the match would continue to be made into the future.

Over time, the decline in service quality and the difficulties in managing a large, multi-faceted agency prompted the Mayor and the Council to begin the process of unwinding DPW. Several separate agencies were created from DPW, including water and sewer, property management and motor vehicles. In each case the move has concentrated management attention and brought improved services.

Before I discuss the proposed separation of transportation from the solid waste/Clean City functions of DPW, I would like to detail where the transportation program was before we started our rebuilding efforts a year-and-half ago.

In the spring of 2000, the state of our transportation programs was not good. Here are some examples:

- ✍✍ **Street cuts** – The street cut crisis during the winter of 1999 and the following spring was only one warning to us that much was wrong with our stewardship of the transportation infrastructure.
- ✍✍ **Local Road Quality** – Lack of resources and lack of organizational focus on the emerging infrastructure problems allowed our local road infrastructure to decay so that nearly 50% of local roads were rated fair or poor on our pavement management index rating system.
- ✍✍ **Streetlights** – Maintenance of all of our assets suffered. In fact, 1 in 5 streetlights were found this summer to be missing the base plate covers – DDOT needed to replace 9,750 of 47,000.
- ✍✍ **Trees** – In our best year in five, only half the trees needing to be trimmed were worked on.
- ✍✍ **Expenditures** – While DDOT had more than five hundred million dollars in the bank, it's spending was only at a rate just slightly higher than its annual obligations from the Federal government.
- ✍✍ **Potholes and maintenance** – In the summer of 2000, only 40 people remained working in the District's street maintenance operation – Baltimore has more than five times as many. Potholes were being filled in nine days on average.

- ✍✍**Criminal investigations** – DDOT was the subject of multiple criminal investigations by Federal law enforcement authorities and Federal Inspectors General with several staff indictments.
- ✍✍**Contracting** – The process to identify, design and construct a bridge rehabilitation project averaged eight years—far too long.
- ✍✍**Community Outreach** – ANC 3D-04 Commissioner John Finney in his recent testimony before Councilman Catania said it best: the only notice of an impending DDOT project in those days was the No Parking signs tied to trees.
- ✍✍**Bicycle/Pedestrian Safety** – No reporting on safety statistics had been done since 1979. No new bike lanes had been striped since the Carter Administration. And although Federal funds were available to support the position of a bicycle coordinator, it remained vacant year after year despite the best efforts of the Chair of this Committee.
- ✍✍**Traffic Calming** – We had no traffic calming program, indeed some people suggested that our idea of traffic calming was street cuts!
- ✍✍**Technology** – Once a world leader in deploying new transportation technology, the District had slipped woefully behind – there was only one traffic camera (in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street tunnel) while Virginia has many times that number just within and around the Beltway.
- ✍✍**Vision** – We had lost our infrastructure vision. We were rehabilitating our infrastructure without thinking as to its purpose or surroundings. For example, we were going to close the 9<sup>th</sup> Street, NE, bridge for a year-and-half just as the District’s first big-box shopping center was to open right next door.
- ✍✍**Project Control** – We had begun to lose control over our projects. On R Street, NW, we were planning three different projects on three adjoining segments with three separate contracts.
- ✍✍**Finances** – While the finances for the 400 miles of Federal-aid eligible roads had been stabilized by the District’s Highway Trust Fund, there were virtually no resources to fund local infrastructure improvements – local streets were notorious for their potholes and bumpiness, creating a Dickensian ‘tale of two cities’ when you compared Federally and locally supported streets.
- ✍✍**Safety** – Our street maintenance operation had no safety cones and our staff was equipped with dark blue uniforms. They now have state-of-the-art visibility vests, cones and other gear.
- ✍✍**Facilities** – Street maintenance was housed in 35 year-old trailers –

manufactured housing has come a long way, by the way.

✍️ **Employee Investment** – Even though we had \$500k in annual Federal training funds, 90% went unspent for want of a training plan and curriculum.

DDOT's problems were not the fault of the hard working people who persevered and managed to continue during the worst days of the financial crisis. DDOT's problems arose because there was no focused attention on transportation, no one able to speak directly to the District's leadership, the Mayor and the Council, about transportation problems.

For example, one area that suffered greatly from the budget cuts was planning, a vital transportation function. Over time, the lack of sufficient planning staff, the continued attrition of skilled engineers, retirements and hiring freezes, all took their toll on project quality. This was particularly true for the critical early part of project development known as scoping, i.e., the development of the basic concept for the project. And poorly developed scopes led to bad designs and inevitable problems in construction, leading to delays and higher costs.

Maintenance also paid the price. Deferring maintenance is a short-term solution - a short-term solution with major long-term, costly implications. At a recent Transportation Research Board conference, a leading expert in maintenance and transportation finance demonstrated that poor maintenance can cost as much as seven times more than caring for the asset over time.

DDOT had reached the point where it was barely functioning. In fact, in an assessment conducted by the Federal Highway Administration in 1998, DDOT was found to need more than 100 additional engineers to simply keep up with its existing programmatic demands.

### **Reform Begins**

It was with this backdrop that the Mayor asked me to come to DDOT to assess the problems and implement reforms. Based on the findings of his transportation transition team and the excellent report prepared for then Deputy Mayor Douglas Patton, the Mayor asked me to pursue the creation of a separate Department of Transportation. To insure a smooth transition, he asked me to work side by side with the Director of Public Works and

develop a mutually agreeable plan.

With a seat at the Mayor's cabinet table and the assignment to develop, manage and be accountable for a transportation program suitable for the Nation's Capital, I was given a scorecard and asked to sign a performance agreement. Over the last 18 months, we drove that sense of mission throughout the organization and refocused our staff. We organized ourselves around our core business lines. From nineteen unaffiliated offices spread throughout the DPW we have coalesced around five core functional areas and a directorate. We did this with the assistance of the Volpe Center, the Federal Highway Administration's in-house consulting arm. Volpe looked at transportation and public works agencies nationwide and helped us divide the DPW/DDOT programs.

What we found was that the essential, core transportation function remained largely intact within DPW. Programmatically, a switch of parking management analysts for landscape staff would essentially net to zero. Administratively DDOT would only need to carve out a minimum number of positions from DPW's administrative services. Other positions already existed in duplicate, such as legal counsel. Some administrative functions had been dedicated nearly entirely to DDOT already – such as contracting and capital budgeting. Finally, other administrative functions made clear sense to “contract-in” through mutual service agreements between a stand-alone DDOT and DPW, such as the drug testing required for commercial driver's licenses.

The separate DDOT would be responsible for planning, construction, operation and maintenance of the District's transportation infrastructure and trees. DPW would focus on keeping our city clean through its solid waste management, street cleaning, parking enforcement, fleet management and the Energy Office.

Based on the Volpe findings and additional organizational design work performed with DDOT and DPW senior staff, we began to organize ourselves around the proposed new structure. In April of this year the Mayor signed a reorganization plan for DPW/DDOT that put in place the new structure within DPW – preparing for the final step of the legislative reorganization that is before you today.

## Accomplishments

Our efforts at new organization have already begun to pay off. I am proud to point out that within the year-and-one-half that I have headed the District Division of Transportation; we have had some notable accomplishments across the full range of transportation activities for which the Division is responsible. These include:

### Roads and Bridges

- ✍✍ **Repaving 1,200 Blocks** - Over the last two summers and falls, with the help of Congress, the Financial Authority and the Council, DDOT has used \$22 million in National Capital Infrastructure Funds to resurface 1,200 blocks of neighborhood streets in all parts of the city. Last year's total alone was twice the total number of blocks repaved in the five prior years combined!
- ✍✍ **Paving with Full Lane Closure**— This spring we experimented with full closure repaving methods on New York Avenue and South Capitol Street to sharply reduce the time such work takes. Both projects succeeded because of planning, focus and communications.
- ✍✍ **Asset Management** - In August 2000, DDOT signed the DC Streets contract with VMS, Inc., to maintain 75 miles of the National Highway System (NHS), such as Suitland Parkway, I-295 and New York and Connecticut Avenues. This \$65 million, five year “performance based” contract requires VMS to meet pre-defined levels of service--for potholes, graffiti, litter removal etc. The attached chart shows performance over the last 15 months. It is the first contract of its sort to use federal monies (in this case redirected Barney Circle funds) for urban road maintenance. Already representatives from more than 10 other cities have come to DDOT to talk about this contract and our experience with it.
- ✍✍ **Street Maintenance Improvements** - We have also made substantial progress on potholes. Response times are down to less than three days and requests are down overall. We will continue to use innovative programs to expand our pothole workforce, particularly Welfare to Work and other partnerships with the Department of Employment Services. Maintenance staff has more than doubled to just under ninety.
- ✍✍ **Bridges** – DDOT is rebuilding the District's bridge inventory, moving us

from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> in the nation for lowest number of structurally deficient bridges. Our 14<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge project is finishing months ahead of schedule and both New York Avenue and the SE/SW freeway projects will be done this winter.

✍️ **The Georgetown Project** – DDOT has led the effort to bring the various utilities together for a comprehensive renewal of Georgetown's utility and streetscape infrastructure. The partnership of residents, businesses, utilities, contractors and D.C. Government can serve as a model of community involvement in infrastructure projects.

## System Improvements

✍️ **Street Cut Management** – Even with no let-up in the work in the public space, it is being done in a more orderly and safe manner because of the focus and accountability our new management team has brought. Using the authority given to us by the Council, we have been able to collect more than \$32 million in annual rental fees, issue fines that actually discourage lawlessness (over \$100,000 in fines issued to date), and develop policies for informing residents and pavement restoration that set a national standard. We have applied technology to assist us in mapping utility plans and identifying co-location opportunities – we now have over 25,000 linear feet in co-locations installed or underway. In fact our GIS team placed second in a national contest for their co-location map. We also have introduced both directional boring and ground-penetrating radar to the District to speed work and minimize disruption.

✍️ **Bicycle Program** - DDOT has made impressive gains in the bicycle program. These include: hiring the first full-time bicycle coordinator in 10 years, installing 70 bicycle-parking racks at District government buildings, libraries and recreation centers, signing an agreement with WMATA to include the Metropolitan Branch Trail in the new New York Avenue Metro station; striping the first mile of bike lanes; and issuing a report on collisions involving bicycles and pedestrians, as requested by the Council.

✍️ **Trees** – DDOT has begun the process of rebuilding its tree program, hiring a first-ever State Forester and going from zero to three arborists on board. In fact, right now, our water truck is delivering water to evergreens at District recreation centers throughout the city. And this is only the beginning given our partnership with the new Casey Tree Foundation.

✍️ **Wayfinding Signage** – No longer requiring visitors to rely on their high school American history classes to find their way around town, DDOT, in

cooperation with the National Capital Planning Commission, General Services Administration, Federal Highway Administration and the Downtown BID coordinated the development of a new wayfinding signage system to allow visitors to find major destinations more easily.

✍✍ **Garfield Park** – DDOT partnered with the Department of Park and Recreation and the Federal Highway Administration to rehabilitate Garfield Park on Capitol Hill as part of the reconstruction of the SE/SW Freeway. Mayor Williams and Councilmember Ambrose dedicated the park in June.

## **Mass Transit**

✍✍ **Transit Development** – DDOT led the effort to begin construction of the New York Avenue station. DDOT has been working with WMATA to explore the potential for reintroducing light rail to various corridors throughout the District. And DDOT is participating in the development of next month's regional transit planning summit, which will discuss securing funds for transit, enhancing core capacity and a regional transit development strategy.

## **Regional involvement**

✍✍ **Emergency Response and Preparedness** – Under the aegis of the Mayor's Domestic Preparedness Task Force, DDOT is coordinating a regional effort to mesh evacuation route plans, improve inter-agency communication, develop commercial vehicle management strategies, and improve information sharing. Participating in our working groups are representatives from MDOT, VDOT, and the surrounding counties. The GIS mapping system developed by this subcommittee is now being used by all the surrounding jurisdictions as well as FEMA. And we are bringing this expertise to the transportation committee of the homeland defense task force that was initiated under your leadership at COG.

✍✍ **Air Quality** – DDOT has led the discussions of developing air quality improvement measures. The implications of non-attainment are staggering for the region's transportation infrastructure. Redoubled efforts must be made to ensure continued air quality improvements and regional economic growth.

## **Organization**

- ✍️ **Local Road Highway Trust Fund (HTF)** – Through the leadership of this Committee, DDOT has begun to stabilize the resources available to it for its local infrastructure enhancement and improvement needs. With the eventual dedication of all rights-of-way rental fees to the HTF, DDOT will have the basis for ending the “tale of two cities” described above.
- ✍️ **Spending** – DDOT has begun spending its resources. In FY 2001 DDOT spent more than \$250 million for infrastructure renewal – a 40% increase over FY 2000 which had already seen a 33% increase over FY 1999. In short, DDOT more than doubled spending between FY 1999 and 2001!
- ✍️ **Teams** - The traditional functions of design, materials inspection and site inspection would be de-emphasized in favor of a new cross-functional operation concerned with the delivery of a proposed asset. Each team will be given a portfolio of projects and the resources necessary to deliver, fostering accountability and greater productivity.

## Vision

- ✍️ **Anacostia Waterfront Initiative** – As part of our expanding relationship with the Office of Planning, DDOT has co-sponsored the effort to develop a comprehensive plan for the Anacostia waterfront. This multi-year vision for transformation will include a substantial investment in transportation infrastructure improvements and changes.
- ✍️ **Transit-oriented Development** – Co-chairing the Mayor’s Task Force on Transit Oriented Development, DDOT is assisting the Office of Planning in developing a set of guidelines that link land use decisions to transportation infrastructure investment.
- ✍️ **Rail-volution** – In conjunction with our co-sponsorship of an exhibit of the history of urban mass transit (particularly the streetcar) at the Building Museum, DDOT will host the next Rail-volution urban mass transit conference.

## Sustaining the gains

I am sure that you will agree that we have made impressive gains in turning the Division of Transportation around. But, unfortunately, these gains will not be sustainable, and expanded, without the continued focus on transportation problems that has come under the present arrangement. The person responsible for transportation issues must report directly to the

Mayor and the Council.

A department of transportation is the most effective way to provide this continuing focus. The first priority clearly is to make sure our transportation system never comes close to the low point of 1995. This means we must always make our federal highway match, we must keep our local roads free of bumps, potholes and uncontrolled street cuts and we must make our tree program a national model.

Our regional relationships are growing and we need to deal with our Maryland and Virginia neighbors on an equal basis. Whether it's Metro expansion, coordinating emergency response or synchronizing traffic signals, a District department of transportation is needed to fulfill these missions.

DDOT also needs to be able to compete nationally for resources, for funding and for recognition. Next summer, Congress will be considering a transportation authorization bill that will be worth more than a quarter of a trillion dollars over six years. Will the District be able to compete for its share or will it be again absent from the debate?

The proposed District Department of Transportation will provide the focus, accountability and sustainability to achieve these goals.

I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.

## *Attachment*

### **Proposed Administrative Structure**

DDOT should assume all responsibility for the planning, construction, inspection and maintenance of all transportation facilities and public rights-of-way within the District of Columbia. DDOT has analyzed where it can contribute the most the “value-added” to the transportation infrastructure development process and will focus its efforts there, and reduce its resources and efforts on those areas where it can have lesser, or even negative impact.

#### **Office of Director**

The highest level of accountability will reside in this office with responsibility for policy direction, overall management and administration of the DDOT. The Office of the Director will provide strategic planning assistance with regards to the overall management and execution of DDOT’s mission and functions, resource allocation, and communications. In addition, the office will serve as the point-of-contact to help solve recurring problems within individual Wards and serve as a link between the District government and the Neighborhood Services Coordinators (NSC). The agency will also implement and maintain an integrated program of risk assessment and control for the agency.

#### **Transportation Policy and Planning**

Historically, the Division of Transportation has been reactive, lacking in vision, failing to communicate with citizens and interest groups. Low resource focus on planning, scoping, and project management resulted in a low inventory of prospective projects; high inventories of works-in-progress; low community input; and limited follow-through and effort to get projects “through the system.” However, additional focus will be put on the beginning of the project value chain: planning. This function is currently the most under invested component of the Division of Transportation’s structure, and by developing it, the administration will have the ability to develop projects, as well as provide the policy direction and meet compliance requirements for federal funding.

#### **Infrastructure Project Management**

This administration will replace the Design, Engineer and Construction Administration (DECA) and be re-organized around a project management

model. The traditional functions of design, materials inspection and site inspection would be de-emphasized in favor of a new cross-functional operation that will be concerned with the delivery of a proposed asset. The teams will be self-sufficient, comprised on a project management team leader; a lead engineer; two or three engineers (design, bridge/structural, and general); a public relations office and support staff (clerical and inspectors). Each team will be given a portfolio of projects and the resources necessary to deliver – this structure will foster ownership, accountability and greater productivity.

### **Traffic Services**

The Traffic Services Administration will be realigned into five divisions, Traffic Operations and Safety, Traffic Signal System, Traffic Management Systems, Curbside Management and Electrical Divisions. This new structure will place all necessary activities for each service within a division. This will make each division responsible for the product they provide – design, installation, maintenance, and complaint resolution.

### **Rights-of-Way Management**

Prior to the street-cut crisis of 2000, the Division of Transportation had roughly four staff dedicated to the monitoring and enforcement of rights-of-way access procedures and standards. The administration has been realigned to ensure that maintenance becomes a pro-active operation rather than a request or complaint-driven action/response. This change was facilitated by the creation of Neighborhood Infrastructure Maintenance Officer (NIMO). NIMOs will be responsible for assessing the status of the infrastructure throughout the District. This division is responsible for conducting ward-by-ward assessments to develop prioritized lists of infrastructure problems. The division will present to and interact with the communities to identify infrastructure problems and their level of community priority.

### **Tree Management**

The Tree Management Administration has been promoted to the administration level to ensure that it receives the proper attention and accountability. With the recent recruitment of a State Forester and the collaborative relationship with the Casey Tree Foundation, DDOT is well on its way to developing a world class tree operation.